**Mahouka X SAO**
**Dream Game -Crossover-**

In the field of magic, there are objects known as *Relics*. They are OOPArts[1] that possess magical abilities and cannot be reproduced by current end-of-the-21st century technology.

Second-years of the National Magic University Affiliated First High School, siblings Shiba Tatsuya and Shiba Miyuki, along with their schoolmates, were involved in the rampage of such a 「Relic」 last September.[2] Named the 「Dream Caster」 for the sake of convenience, the *Relic* was activated by absorbing a fixed amount of Thought Particles (Psions) emitted by unaware humans. It had the function of making a fictional world——in other words, a theatre experience-type amusement park——for entertainment purposes, that allowed communication among a group that used the machine to connect their dreams.

Due to having aged at least 10,000 years, the communication function had degraded, and for this reason, Tatsuya's group worked through their troublesome and embarrassing feelings unnecessarily, and the documentation of this event was stored in the video recording in between April to October of 2095, so it will be omitted. The important thing was——

"……We seem to have been dragged in again."

"……You're right, Onii-sama."

The siblings were once again dragged into an **unreal** world created by the Dream Caster.

In the real world, the Nine-School Competition of August, 2096 AD had just ended. For the first time in awhile, the two who returned home from

[1] Out of Place Artifacts
[2] The first 8 Mahouka limited edition BDs apparently also came with a side story, titled "Mahouka Koukou no Rettousei Dream Game" (8 parts). That's most likely the past event that is continuously being referred to in this story.

Fuji fell asleep in their own beds. And, after they regained consciousness, the siblings found themselves standing in front of a brickwork-styled, detached house in a deep forest.

Both of them had changed to their sleepwear, although one was dressed in pyjamas and the other in negligee, and went to bed. However, Miyuki was now wearing a white, long dress covering the bottom of her neck and Tatsuya was wearing soldier-style, leather armour with a cloak on. A 「role」 was implied by the outfit, but luckily, they maintained their consciousness. After awakening, the siblings were relieved that they didn't end up in an awkward situation where they would writhe in embarrassment.

"Onii-sama, where on earth is the *Relic* installed? I have no memories of seeing a place like this……"

What concerned her was why they ended up in a situation like this.

"I don't remember seeing it either. That *Relic* was considered to be dangerous, thus it was supposed to be put away for storage under strict supervision, so this could be another device operating…… really, how many *Relics* as unique as that one were discovered in succession?"

With this question provoking his mind, Tatsuya turned his 「eyes」 toward the ground that he was standing on.

"What the……?"

"Onii-sama!?"

Tatsuya's loud groan was so unusual that Miyuki let out her impatience.

"Sorry, I was just surprised. However, this is……"

The particles seen by Tatsuya's information body perceiving 「eyes」 were not just Spirit Particles (Psychions) like the previous time.

"……Thought Particles (Psions) and electrons have become intertwined?"

Miyuki, who had been obediently waiting for her brother's explanation, exclaimed 'Wha?' at his monologue and opened her eyes.

"Electrons? Then that means that this virtual world isn't a world made using the power of a *Relic*, but made with the use of electronic technology?"

After finishing her question, Miyuki realised she had jumped to a conclusion.

P s i o n s　　P u s h i o n s
"Ah, but Thought Particles and Spirit Particles are also used?"

Tatsuya nodded with a stern and serious look.

"Yeah. However, this information structure is not something made by signal conversion that uses Sensory Stones. To reproduce the five senses, it seems to be using technology that far surpasses ours."

"Does an organisation that can conceal such a technology exist?"

Virtual reality technology was a field every country was competing to create . If it could not only reproduce sight and hearing, but also the sense of touch and motion, its demand would be immeasurable in the fields of education, communication and entertainment.

No, probably not."

"Then who on earth……"

"I don't know. For the time being, I came up with a hypothesis, but there's no point in discussing it now. Before that, what should we do to return to reality?"

Tatsuya once again strained his 「eyes」.

"……A link with reality is maintained. Although it seems like this world is a result of an interference of an unknown technology on the *Relic*'s function."

“Then, we can return if we wake up, right?”

Miyuki asked Tatsuya in a somewhat relieved voice.

“We can. However, I believe that it’s necessary to meet some conditions, like that time.”

“Conditions, you say…… I wonder what do we have to do this time.”

Miyuki complained with a dejected face.

Tatsuya gave a smile in response to his sister’s expression, but as a matter of fact, he didn’t declare ‘we can’ with complete self-confidence.

(……If needed, I could 「Decompose」 the electronic structure. With that, the interference should be dissolved, but……)

He was able to read the structure of electronic information. In other words, it means that he is able to 「Decompose」 it with his power.

However, what he read was just the information of the structure of this world. If he invoked 「Decomposition」, he predicted that this world would partially collapse. That’s like destroying a random pillar inside a building that one doesn’t understand the full structure of. He didn’t know what adverse reaction would occur and affect the players inside, in other words, themselves, if the world was broken beyond expectation as a consequence of the dissolution of the interference.

(……The use of「Decomposition」is a last resort.)

Tatsuya did not want to worry his sister, so he asked a completely different question.

“By the way, Miyuki, can you use magic?”

“Huh, magic you say?”

Miyuki made a blank expression for just a moment, then immediately closed her eyes, concentrated, and tried muttering in various languages, and then tried drawing figures in the air with her fingers, repeating it all

through trial and error. Finally, she faced Tatsuya and shook her head apologetically.

"……There was a response for temperature interference magic. But rather than other types of magic being blocked, I get the feeling that we never had the authorisation for them in the first place."

"What kind of response?"

"Practically, I don't feel the sensation of a spell being invoked. I think that others in this virtual *simulator* are imitating the invocation of magic, so to say…… to allow them to get as close to experience magic as they possibly can."

The virtual *simulator* **in Tatsuya's and his friends' reality** has only reached the stage of reproducing sight and hearing so far, but it was sufficient for magic learning. When learning new spells, the invocation and actual experience differed so the image of the activation had to be effective for comprehension.

However, this approach was not applied practically, as there was a side effect leading people think they could use magic they couldn't, and as a result, all National Magic University Affiliated High Schools were unwilling to use it. Instead, this form of training was used by the police and the army, where their magic users were completely established.

"*Simulator*, huh……Which response is stronger, incantations or magic circles?"

"Incantations. However, the only thing that I received a practical response from were spell names."

"Hmm……"

Tatsuya folded his arms and got lost in his thoughts, then suddenly pointed at the closest fir tree (replica) with his left hand.

"*Set, cartridge number five. Default, load.*"

Immediately after he finished saying that line, a Thought Particle bullet——like thing—— that visualised from his left hand fired.

The Thought Particle bullet hit the trunk of the fir tree, cast a dazzling light and split open. On the surface, what remained was a deep hole approximately 10 centimetres deep. In reality, damaging an object with a Thought Particle bullet that did not have any physical effect would be a completely impossible phenomenon.

“Onii-sama!? What on earth did……”

Miyuki’s upset shout was only natural.

“……This phenomenon is unexpected, but the operating protocols are according to expectations.”

Tatsuya said without hiding his surprise, but with a sound of satisfaction mixed in, drawing Miyuki’s attention.

“Operating protocols, you say?”

“Yeah. You did say that among classical incantations, only spell names had a response, didn’t you?”

“Yes.”

“So, I thought that tracing the usual CAD operating protocols by inputting voice commands in this virtual reality world would do the trick.”

“I see…… As expected from you, Onii-sama. I didn’t think of such a thing.”

“Thanks to your accurate senses.”

Tatsuya laughed and shook his head, then once again pointed his left hand towards the fir tree.

"*Number two, load.*"

A Thought Particle (Psion) bullet once again flew from his left hand. However, this time, it did not injure the trunk. Instead, it blew away the smoke of the residual Thought Particles (Psions) in the bullet hole.

"Hmm. I reproduced non-systematic, huh."

This time, he pointed at the tree close to his right hand.

"*Select, the right.*"

——The virtual CAD in his right hand was designated.

"*Set, cartridge number one.*"

——The cartridge-type storage number one was *set* in the CAD.

"*Default.*"

——Without operating the Activation Sequence *selector*, he declared the use of the first Activation Sequence.

"*Load.*"

——He began reading the Activation Sequence.

In theory, the next part would be constructing a magic sequence within his Magic Calculation Area, and then invoking the spell.

However, this time, nothing happened.

"『Decomposition』can't be reproduced **this way**, huh. Just as you said, it seems that the variety of magic that can be reproduced is limited."

"I'd also like to try it."

Miyuki who said that extended her left in front of her chest and her right hand towards the fir tree.

"Activation Sequence number fourteen, execute."

However, nothing happened.

"Miyuki, the CAD's OS is based on English."

"Ah, right."

Miyuki blushed slightly, and repeated the same gesture.

"*Starting Formula, number one four. Load.*"

This time, ice formed on the surface of the tree just as she had designated.

"……That's amazing. There are no actual magic invocations, yet a magic-like phenomenon occurs."

"That's because this place is a type of *simulation* space. It's not that a change in phenomena occurs, it just looks like it."

"Right."

Miyuki laughed with a bit of embarrassment. Tatsuya also showed a smile, but then immediately stiffened his expression.

"Although it's only partially, we can reproduce magic, so we should be able to avoid the worst case of being exposed to violence that we cannot oppose."

Hearing her brother's words, Miyuki shivered with a *brr* sound. In this *situation*——she didn't think of the possibility of the worst case scenario of being dragged into a violent adult game world, as prey.

"However, I'm still worried. What on earth is the 『role』 assigned to us?"

"……Onii-sama. I don't think that we'll get to a conclusion even if we think about it. I'm sure that there should be action from the other side, so why don't we just rest here until then?"

After saying so, Miyuki turned her eyes towards the brickwork-styled mansion.

“You’re right. There might be clues inside.”

Tatsuya, protecting Miyuki from the back as usual, opened the door to the mansion.

It was warm inside the mansion. To an extent where they finally noticed that the temperature outside was considerably low.

A fire was dancing in the fireplace. Empty tea utensils were lined up on the table. Upon touching the cup, a faint warmth could be felt. Just to be sure, they touched the *side* that wasn’t facing the fireplace and discovered that it wasn’t warm due to the radiant heat. It seemed that the cup had been emptied just a short while ago.

And yet, there was no one there. Tatsuya looked in all of the rooms in the mansion, but in the end, he couldn't find any inhabitants. As if this was the reproduction of the Mary Celeste[3] **legend** (not the incident). If there was a rational explanation anyway—— in a fictional world constructed inside a dream, there is neither rationality, nor irrationality——

“It seems we’re the inhabitants of this mansion.”

Miyuki nodded at Tatsuya’s opinion.

“It should be fine for us to wait here.”

“You’re right. If we move carelessly, it will only drag it on unnecessarily.”

[3] A British ship that was discovered sailing in the Atlantic ocean without its crew, despite no apparent reason for them to abandon the ship.

In front of Miyuki who looked happy for some reason, Tatsuya gave a deep sigh.

The inside of the mansion, as could be seen from the outside, was a living space inconveniently located in a place with absolutely no relation to civilization. However, Miyuki seemed to be enjoying the current state of affairs.

This was largely because they were able to use magic, although limited. They were able to use temperature interference magic, so lighting a fire and boiling water wasn't an inconvenience. There was no water supply, but there was a well in the middle of the mansion. With this, just some physical labor was enough to prevent cold. Of course, it was Tatsuya's duty to draw water from the well.

The mansion was also stocked with food. As the ground was very cold, the food cellar was a natural refrigerator full of fresh meat and vegetables. What made Miyuki especially happy was the abundantly *stacked*, huge variety of herb tea.

"With this, we don't need to worry about your tea, Onii-sama.", when Tatsuya saw his sister muttering that with a truly delightful smile, a "let's worry about different things" line left his throat.

Last time——in other words, one year ago——this had also happened, but no physiological phenomena occurred in this world. And yet, it was irritating when one's throat would feel thirsty and one's stomach would feel empty, so they appreciated being able to eat and drink without worrying about other things…… Though, they did not appreciate the fact that they were dragged into this world in the first place .

Leaving behind Miyuki, who took out new tea utensils and was happily preparing tea, Tatsuya continued his investigation of the mansion. He had already figured out why there were no people, but he thought that there should at least be clues on what they were supposed to do.

The results of the search was that Tatsuya found something, or perhaps, a pattern that looked like a clue. The clue was that diamond-shaped

markings were engraved on the furniture and accessories, as well as the decoration on the mansion's walls and on its ornaments. The pattern was very simple. Weren't they runes that represented 「Yngvi」, one of the three chief gods in Norse mythology, also known as the harvest god Frey?

Speaking of Frey, the most well-known myth about him was probably 「Skírnismál」, an *episode* where he proposed to the most beautiful female Gerðr, a giantess. Frey, who fell in love with Gerðr at first sight, sent his servant Skírnir to the realm of giants, Jötunheimr, as the messenger delivering his marriage proposal. Skírnir struggled to reach the home of Gerðr's father, Gymir, and after struggling through the *trouble* —— perhaps a battle with Gymir's subordinates——that occurred in front of Gymir's home, Skírnir safely reached Gerðr and passed on the words of his lord. At first, Gerðr rejected the proposal, but thanks to Skírnir's ingenious persuasion (threats?), she agreed to meet with Frey. After that, Gerðr became Frey's wife.

……That was the *episode*, but is the *scenario* of this 「drama」 written using the *motifs* of this myth? It's probably true that there weren't many players that were suitably appropriate to play the part of Gerðr compared to Miyuki. After all it's the role of 「the prettiest girl」.

However, if that's the case, what could be his part? There is a theory that Gerðr's brother was killed by Frey. At that time, Frey did not have his prized sword , the「Sword of Victory」, so this *episode* should take place before his wedding with Gerðr. If we assumed that, could his role be to challenge Frey who would come to take his sister?

Or, is his role to be Gymir, the father who opposed the marriage? Gymir seemed to be a hot-headed person, or should I say giant. Could the troubles that Skírnir faced, as he struggled to reach Gymir's home, been a clash with Gymir, whom he defeated with the 「Sword of Victory」 that he borrowed from Frey? Or was Tatsuya himself assigned the role of hindering that messenger?

There's also a theory that Gymir left a ferocious watchdog to guard Gerðr's room. Could Tatsuya be that watchdog?

(……At any rate, if Miyuki's role is to be Gerðr, then it should be fine for me to hinder the marriage proposal.)

The role he was given in the dream world one year ago was nothing but trouble. At that time, Tatsuya's *motivation* was at the lowest point. However, this time Tatsuya felt a simmering eagerness well up within.

The investigation of the mansion was finished in a day.

As for the progress of the scenario——the first 「messengers」 arrived the next morning.

Just as they were in the midst of having their tea after breakfast, the roaring sound of an explosion could be heard outside the mansion. Tatsuya kept Miyuki from hastily running outside to check out the situation, and put on his leather armour. He then put on the cloak that Miyuki brought, picked up the spear leaning against a rack in the entranceway, and opened the door.

Outside, the forest was on fire. Right before him stood five men, wearing red armour and carrying long spears. Perhaps this world was configured to visualise spirit lights partially, as a fire-like, red, flickering spirit light could be seen engulfing their bodies. Their magical appearance gave the impression that they were fire-type ghosts or fire spirits. ——Even if their armour had soot and dirt here and there.

"……Were you the ones who started the fire?"

Tatsuya asked this question while amazed at their recklessness and admiring how a good fire was managed in this temperature. However, this question struck the men's nerves.

"D-don't screw around with us!"

“Isn't this your trap!?”

Hearing the men demand an explanation, the clueless Tatsuya tilted his head puzzledly for a moment. Then, he remembered a theory that Gymir’s spear was protected by fire.

Comprehension dawned on Tatsuya’s face, and this convinced, or rather, reinforced the men's inaccurate assumption that Tatsuya was unmistakably the person behind the fire-wall trap.

“Here we go!”

In response to the shout of the man——at a closer look, 「shounen」[4]would be more appropriate to represent his approximate age compared to「man」——in the centre of the party of five , the remaining four energetically answered with 「Yeah!」.

The five shounens came charging with spear tips in a row. Tatsuya questioned their unfathomable strategy.

Their armour seemed to be made of leather, similar to the one Tatsuya himself was wearing. However, unlike his *protectors* that only protected his vital points, what they were wearing seemed to cover almost every part of their body. Because of this, the armour seemed to have considerable weight. At the very least, it should be of an excessive weight in contrast to their physical ability——their physical strength.

Their charging pace was fairly slow.

In the first place, their assault by forming a line of spears was a tactic meant for anti-cavalry, or group versus group battles. There’s no trick regarding their individual walking pace. It was an effective strategy if they charged with the speed that came from riding a mount or a *chariot*, or mechanical power-type *roller shoes*, or making use of flight magic and

[4] Shounen (少年, lit. "few years") is a word used to refer to a young male who is between elementary and high school age. I originally translated this as "youth", but then I noticed how much Tatsuya started spamming this word, along with seinen later on, and decided to just romanise the term instead.

other means, but if they were charging at the speed of just a half run……

"Gyaa!"

"Gue!"

……In that case, they would all just end up being crushed prey.

"This guy is tough!"

"Don't *charge*! Surround him!"

"Keep him busy until we have him surrounded!"

From the posture of using weapons, Tatsuya judged them to be complete amateurs, but after listening to their conversation, he changed his perception.

Even though two of them were brought down and, moreover, one of the two was stabbed and suffered a deep injury, they did not start to panic.

——They're unexpectedly accustomed to it.

(What a pity.)

They have experience, but not competency. It seems as though they are compelled to fight without sufficient experience.

Despite thinking this, Tatsuya didn't plan on going easy on them at all. Tatsuya was wearing armour that he wasn't accustomed to, and was provided with a spear like theirs. During **last year's experience**, he did use part of his time tempering his skills at classical weaponry, but Tatsuya certainly did not plan on specialising in spears and swords in the future.

Ignoring the shounen trying to circle around him, Tatsuya stepped

forward. The idea to keep him busy from the front until the encirclement formation could be completed was smart. However, their aim since the beginning was to keep him occupied, and just close in behind him instead of a direct attack. If the opponents did not present a threat, they merely isolated their own forces.

Tatsuya restrained the head of the long spear that was thrusted in haste. He followed up with a downward spike forcing the enemy's spear to stab the ground, and the user's body moved forward in response.

Tatsuya assumed a hanmi[5] stance, pulled out the spear, and struck back with it, superficially striking the right shoulder of his opponent.

The shrieking shounen fell on his behind. While Tatsuya felt discomfort as he did not sense his attack reaching the bone, he judged that he had dealt the *damage* that he intended, and faced the opponent to his right.

As for the opponent to the right, in other words, the one who thrust at him from the back, he used the blunt end of the spear to parry. Then, he rotated the spear 180 degrees, attacking the shounen, whose face tightened in surprise, in a flowing motion. The shounen's thigh was not pierced, but completely cut through. He cried out in pain as his leg rolled on the ground, but somehow he wasn't bleeding.

(These guys look like humans on the outside, but they aren’t on the inside……?)

There were neither bones nor blood vessels, just particles carrying light scattering. And those particles disappeared into the sky. It was a beautiful battle without bloodshed.

Tatsuya then faced the last shounen, and the shounen stiffened. Or perhaps he stiffened after their eyes met.

[5] A stance with legs in an L-shape, with one leg bent in front and other extended behind (martial arts, traditional theater).

He no longer had any fighting spirit. Nevertheless, he couldn't abandon his friends either.

Tatsuya decided to relieve the shounen from this *dilemma*.

He sent the opponent's spear flying with a horizontal sweep, and the spear stabbed into the ground from above.

"Onii-sama, is it over……?"

After confirming that no sounds could be heard, Miyuki gently opened the door. After seeing Miyuki, the shounen that suffered the least damage among the five and, in his final moments, was groaning about being struck in the shoulder, had his breath taken away, as if he had forgotten his pain.

"So **that**…… is Gerðr, huh. In that case, **this** isn't Gymir, but Beli?"

Whether Miyuki's beautiful face paralysed his nerves, or his sense of pain was *cut* by the progress of the *scenario*, the boy stopped groaning and muttered.

After catching that, Tatsuya frowned.

Instead of calling her 'she', he called her 「that」. Instead of calling him 'he', he called him 「this」. This shounen *naturally* didn't treat Tatsuya and Miyuki as humans.

"Oi."

Tatsuya thrusted the tip of the spear in front of the shounen's eyes. 「Hii!」, the shounen gave a scream similar to an incomplete combustion and stopped moving.

"There's something that I want to ask. If you obediently answer, I won't make you feel even more pain."

The shounen opened his eyes wide. The expression that appeared on his face said 「I can't believe it」.

"Damn it……The *boss character* is now threatening us or something?"

(A *boss character*…… I see, I probably seem like a monster in a game.)

In that case, Miyuki is probably perceived as a *trophy*. No wonder they're treating us like 「objects」.

That's one question cleared up, but to the misfortune of the shounen that he didn't even know the name of, that was not what Tatsuya wanted to know.

"Why did you attack me?"

In response to Tatsuya's question, the shounen gave a befuddled expression. If his expressions were to be put in words, it would most likely be 「What is this guy talking about?」.

"I'll ask again. Why did you attack me all of a sudden?"

The shounen still showed no signs of answering.

Tatsuya's *motto* is 「Act, not talk; if you do have something to say, all the more you should back it up with actions.」. Tatsuya put the blade beside the cheek of the shounen, then drew it in.

As the skin of the shounen was cut, he shrieked. Tatsuya harboured a worry that there was no point in cutting the shounen if the his sense of pain was *cut*, but it seems like he was worried over nothing.

"……Shit, if only this wasn't a no-flight area, you majin[6]-type."

[6] A majin (魔人) is a person who has some supernatural power or ability, but apparently in a broader sense than "magician".

The shounen grumbled as he wept. A rather admirable willpower, in a sense. And so, it seems that he could not hope for *communication* via words.

If he could not provide clues on how to break out from this world, he no longer had any use. Tatsuya withdrew his spear and turned his back on the shounen.

"Stop screwing around!"

"At this rate, can we really go back empty handed!"

While returning to the mansion, Tatsuya heard that as well as the sound of footsteps approaching from behind. Tatsuya couldn't suppress his astonishment as he turned around.

The *damage* that Tatsuya dealt to the red-armoured shounens didn't place their lives in danger. However, the *damage* shouldn't have been so light that they could already move either.

Is their level of resilience high, or did they prepare a means to recover from *damage* in a short amount of time?——

While Tatsuya thought about such things, his body moved partially on its own. He parried the shounen's stab with his spear handle, and then stabbed the shounen's chest with its tip as the shounen's posture was broken.

The **corpse** of the shounen whose chest was pierced changed into a small flame and floated in midair.

(That probably isn't a disembodied soul…… a horror-like[7] production, huh……)

[7] Just a note for funsies, it's literally Engrish for "horror-tic". Japanese and their Engrish.

Nevertheless, Tatsuya didn't feel any fear. Whether it was a disembodied soul or a will-o'-the-wisp, it didn't show any liveliness like regrets or a grudge.

After being attacked and counterattacking four more times, Tatsuya returned to the mansion.

Miyuki was not *shocked* seeing the scene of Tatsuya dealing the final blow to the shounen. The conclusion that people don't bleed and that corpses disappear in this world considerably numbed the sense of avoiding murder. This was certainly the feeling of being in a game. Because the information that entered the five senses was only partially real, there was the possibility that one would stop hesitating when it came to slashing or shooting people, **even if they were ordinary people**. If one spent a long time in such a world, they would probably not feel regret even when attacking people in reality, until it was too late. That's what Tatsuya believed.

(……Huh, am I really one to criticise them, when I myself have killed without feeling inhibitions against murder. And besides, it is effective for training people as competent and capable soldiers.)

Tatsuya changed his point of view, while Miyuki tasted the *herb tea* that she remade.

"Onii-sama, did you realise something?"

Miyuki asked from the other side of the table after waiting for Tatsuya to put his *cup* down.

"We weren't able to communicate directly, but there are some things that I understood."

Tatsuya returned the gaze of Miyuki whose attention was focused on

him . ——Whatever Miyuki thought, she timidly blushed, but Tatsuya paid no attention to it and provided her with the information that he had acquired from the attackers, as planned.

“Firstly, the *scenario* this time is *based* on a tale. A tale known as Skírnismál.”

“……A tale from Norse mythology, right? A god named Frey fell into the charms of a woman and gave his prized weapon, which was also his trump card, to his messenger as a reward, and that was the cause of the ruin of the gods later on, or something. The lesson of the 『Femme fatale』 applies to both the West and East, huh.”

“Now hold on a second, Miyuki.”

“Huh?”

Miyuki looked doubtfully towards Tatsuya who had put his finger on his forehead and cast his eyes down. It didn’t seem like her opinion was a joke.

“Who did you hear this story from?”

“When I was in the fifth grade of…… primary school, perhaps. Our mother told me about it.”

It was delightful that they could share a nostalgic, as opposed to sad, talk about their deceased mother. However, at this time, 「I wish she had at least corrected this misunderstanding before passing away……」 was the heartless and unthinkable thing that Tatsuya had on his mind regarding their biological parent.

“That interpretation is wrong in many ways. It can be taken as such, if you look at it from one aspect, but the myth is simpler.

“……Is that so?”

“Yes, it’s mainly about loyalty, a tale of a daring adventure……”

However, giving it more thought, the story talked about winning the favour of women using gifts or through threats, so it can’t possibly be called simple. Realising this, Tatsuya ended up holding his tongue.

“……If you have an interest in it, I’d be glad to personally read it to you after we return to reality.”

It was obvious even to Miyuki that Tatsuya was trying to find a way out of the situation, but she obediently nodded.

“The part that the *scenario* is using this time…”

Feeling that he could no longer stand his sister worrying over him, Tatsuya pulled himself together and returned to the main topic of the conversation.

“Is the part about persuading, or rather taking away, the beautiful Gerðr.”

“Could I be the one given the role of the wicked Gerðr?”

“No, as I said…… Oh, whatever.“

Gerðr wasn’t wicked at all, was what Tatsuya wanted to point out, but explaining that would probably lead them to stray from the core of the story and they would likely end up in a loop at this rate, so he restrained himself.

“And my part seems to be to prevent Gerðr from being taken away.”

“Well……”

Miyuki brought her fingers together in front of her chest and, for some

reason, made an entrancing smile.

"……"

Somehow Tatsuya understood what Miyuki was thinking about, but he wanted to give his ears a break, so he didn't say anything.

"……However, if you think about it, it's strange."

With an innocent look, he attempted to change the topic.

"What is?"

Luckily, Miyuki followed Tatsuya's expectations. Probably, upon figuring out that her brother was trying to change the subject, she acquiesced.

"This mansion is covered in the rune 『Yngvi』 that represents Frey. It's impossible for the story to be set before Gerðr marries Frey."

Tatsuya raised the now empty *teacup* and showed Miyuki the diamond-shaped rune drawn on the bottom.

"So that's Frey's rune? Indeed, Its true that I saw it in various locations."

"Is it a *situation* where, for some reason,Gerðr lives separately from Frey after their marriage or engagement? I don't have any recollection of such an episode……"

Miyuki then expressed her opinion in a moderate voice to the pondering Tatsuya.

"Onii-sama, in a sense, this place is an RPG world. I think that the *scenario* and setting aren't restricted to be faithful to the original story.

Tatsuya couldn't do anything but raise a white flag at Miyuki's

extremely accurate point.

The visitors didn't end with the five-man team in the morning.

The second team, was a *group* of seven in the same red armour as the first five shounens. They also only ended up turning into 「disembodied souls」 and disappearing, providing no additional information.

Right now, the third six-man *group* that opposed them consisted of four people who were wearing heavier equipment than the first group, and two others that were the opposite - they only wore something *robe*-like, without any armour.

The four in heavy equipment put up large shields in front of them and slowly approached. Tatsuya did not understand their reasoning. If there were forty of them, instead of four, or perhaps if they were on a road in a narrow valley, or atop a narrow bridge, then it would mean that they could not be touched without circling around them. However, as they were in an open terrain, and there were but four of them, they could only be hoping to hide the two in the back from Tatsuya's eyes.

(They're hiding them?)

Just as he became aware of such a possibility, he recognised the sounds that, until now, could only be regarded as nothing but noise, were actually voices.

"……***geirr muspilli***."

It was coming from behind the shields. The ones chanting were the two in the rear.

At the same time, red lights could be seen.

Tatsuya dropped, no, **threw** his spear and dived sideways.

It wasn't a pulse coming from the brain, but his thoughts that ordered his limbs. His body, trained by Yakumo, moved **to his satisfaction** even in this false world.

Without losing momentum, Tatsuya rolled on the ground twice and then stood up. Unexpectedly, he ended up beside the wall made of shields.

The area he had been standing at a moment ago was struck by flames.

The spear he threw successfully pierced through one of the *robed* people. It seems that it wasn't a fatal wound. He still maintained the form of a human. He didn't become a will-o'-wisp.

Tatsuya could see the panicking face of a shounen within the *robe* of the one who did not suffer the misfortune of being struck. However, even though the shounen's lips trembled, he continued **chanting the incantation** with the proper pronunciation.

"……***Ek fleygja þrír geirr muspilli***[8]."

Tatsuya did not understand what language this was. He assumed that it was very similar to a Nordic language, but for some reason, he roughly understood its meaning.

(Throw spears of fire, huh?)

The enemy mages——Tatsuya was unwilling to call the actors[players] who were the very image of fantasy as 「magicians」[9]——had already finished the preparations for shooting spears of fire. If this were the real

[8] The incantation of a fire spear spell.

[9] Tatsuya refers to the mages in ALO as 魔法使い (mahou tsukai; lit. magic users), sometimes with furigana メイジ (Engrish for "mage"), which is how magicians in fantasy works and games are commonly referred to, but uses the term 魔法師 (mahoushi; something like "magic specialist") to refer to the 'real' magicians in his own world.

world, he would have the time to neutralise it with *Gram Demolition* or *Gram Dispersion*, but he did not know if he would have sufficient time to intercept it with Non-Systematic Magic in this world, where he would have to use voice commands to imitate its reproduction.

From his back, Tatsuya who had lost his spear drew a thick, one-handed sword, called a *viking sword*, with his right hand and a *parrying dagger*, the guard of which had a hook just like a jitte[10], with his left hand.

He then faced the vanguard with shields and charged. They had changed their individual stance to face Tatsuya, but had not managed to change their formation yet. Tatsuya now flanked the enemy vanguards' wall of lined up shields. From his point of view, the current enemy formation was single file. It wasn't one against four form, but a one versus one in four layers.

Tatsuya struck the edge of the shield of the shounen standing in the front of the column, from the side. From the very beginning, Tatsuya didn't expect this sword and his own skills to be sharp. He used the *viking sword* as a substitute for a club.

As expected, he could neither cut nor break the shield, but the thick sword blade's weight was enough to fulfil the role of a club. The opponent holding his shield in his left hand was struck from the right side, and ended up exposing himself from the front.

Tatsuya thrust with the *dagger* in his left hand. The shounen held out his long sword in front of his body immediately. ——Just as Tatsuya wanted.

Tatsuya restrained the blade with his *parrying dagger*'s hook-shaped guard. As Tatsuya and the shounen in the vanguard were too close to each other, the mages were no longer able to cast their fire spears.

The red-*robed* shounen *canceled* his spell. This, Tatsuya understood

[10] A jitte (十手) is a specialised weapon used by police in Edo period Japan. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jitte.

intuitively. Postponing the question of how he felt that for the moment, he twisted the dagger outwardly. Even though the opponent admirably did not release his long sword, there wasn't much point in doing so. With this, the only thing protecting the shounen now was his armour.

Tatsuya swung his right knee up. The mobility of the leather armour that he was wearing was within his expectations as it did not hinder his movement.

It wasn't for a knee strike, but to pull his folded leg towards his chest and use the momentum to swing it towards the sky.

Tatsuya's heel struck the shounen's chin from below.

Using the shounen, who was thrown head over heels before falling down, as a stepping stone and incidentally crushing his throat underfoot, Tatsuya charged towards his next opponent. Although the single file had spread horizontally, it was still a long way from being a semicircle. As a matter of fact, it was still one versus one.

"*Set, cartridge number five*."

Preparing for the next magic attack, Tatsuya set up to fire his Non-Systematic Magic. Tatsuya didn't think of confirming whether the Non-Systematic Magic that can be reproduced by the data in this world's *system* could actually overcome the magic of this world. But, it's not like it had no effect at all. That was already confirmed. Now for the unrehearsed experiment.

The verbal *command* was to defend against the *damage* of the mages' spells. However, the shounen whose armour Tatsuya was trying to make contact with seemed to have misunderstood this and thought that Tatsuya was using it to attack him.

The shounen's eyes strayed away from Tatsuya's weapon. He couldn't say that it was smart to only look at the opponent's weapon in battle.

However, turning one's attention away from the opponent's weapon was obviously a mistake.

Tatsuya deliberately struck the shield from the front with his *viking sword*.

The armoured shounen's reaction to focus his strength into his shield was late. As his body staggered backwards, his raised shield exposed his legs.

Tatsuya then stomped on his knees.

There was no sensation of a bone breaking. In the first place, there was no feedback of a bone enveloped in skin and muscle. Instead, it felt as if his leg was bent beyond its threshold like a resin, elastic to some extent.

However, even though the inner structure of a human body was not reproduced, the human reaction was reproduced. The shounen let out a magnificent scream and collapsed.

Tatsuya heard the final verse of a chant from the side. It seemed that the mage resolved to chant his incantation even if it resulted in friendly fire. Before Tatsuya could face him, the red-*robed* shounen took advantage of his ally collapsing to face Tatsuya and fire his spell.

"*Load*."

Through voice *command*, Tatsuya verbally executed the Activation Sequence that he had traced up to the selection protocol in advance. At the same time, he directed his left hand toward the fire spear that was flying at him. It was coming at a *speed* that barely gave him enough time to dodge. But he wasn't certain if he'd be able to stop it before impact.

So, Tatsuya took a gamble.

The destruction of a magic sequence via high density Thought Particles, P s i o n s

*Gram Demolition*.

Even though he hadn't attempted it before, he tried intercepting the spell with a Thought Particle (Psion) bullet.

With a *pin* sound, a light bullet——a visualised Thought Particle (Psion) bullet was formed at the tip of his index finger. It was safe to say that it would take a moment for the striations to surge out.

The fire spear and ray system collided in the air.

A physical explosion was reproduced.

Because of this unexpected result, Tatsuya stopped moving. In short, he was taken aback and ended up *freezing* up. It was unsightly in battle, but he couldn't help it. Tatsuya hastily recovered, though luckily his opponents hadn't used this chance to attack him.

All the enemies clad in red, both the ones wearing armour and the ones wearing *robes*, gazed with befuddled expressions at the point where the explosion occurred. It was probably a phenomenon that was impossible even in their *game system*. If they hadn't understood that their game became intertwined with a different *game platform*, like Tatsuya had, they would be overly shocked.

Actually, that seemed to be the case.

"Hah……What was that technique?"

"Could that have been a new component of the boss's skill!?"

The shounens' attention was completely turned away from Tatsuya. Tatsuya decided to make use of this perfect opportunity to experiment.

"*Default, load*."

Right now, cartridge number five that should be set in the fictional CAD was a storage for Non-Systematic Magic Activation Sequences. Activation Sequence number two was 「*Gram Demolition*」, Activation Sequence number three was 「*Gram Dispersion*」, Activation Sequence number five was 「Regrowth」(however, he could use these three comfortably, even without the assistance of the CAD). And, Activation Sequence number one, the default, was 「*Phantom Blow*」.

The beam-turned Thought Particle (Psion) bullet successfully hit the *robed* shounen——making a hole in the centre of the shounen's chest!

In the real world, Tatsuya's 「Phantom Blow」did not have the power to deal fatal wounds. At best, it could stop the opponent's movement for about a second. When he experimented at the very beginning, he made a deep hole in the tree's trunk, but it seems like he didn't get a *plus* bonus from the *game system*. It probably didn't have anything to do with the original magic power, but was instead represented as another spell that had fixed power, was what Tatsuya thought.

However, it was still useful. For the time being, it became the alternative for 「Decomposition」.

"*Default, load*."

Time was needed to utter the *command*, so it seemed like it would be difficult to use in close quarter battles, but it would be an effective weapon in medium to long range.

(It's necessary to verify the effective range.)

He pierced the other mage with a Thought Particle (Psion) bullet, then fired 「Phantom Blow」 at the remaining two heavily armoured swordsmen in succession.

The attack went through the armour without a hitch. However, it was not able to go through their shields.

(This also requires attention, huh.)

Seeing the results of his experiment, Tatsuya defeated the swordsman, who was defending himself from the Thought Particle (Psion) bullet with his shield, with a *viking sword* and *parrying dagger combination*.

Tatsuya left the shounen, who couldn't move as his leg was injured, as he was.

That day, no more visitors came. Using this time, Tatsuya, alongside Miyuki, spent the rest of the day verifying the abilities of usable magic in the back yard, until it was dark.

There were three things they figured out.

The first thing was that the variety of usable magic was considerably limited. Although they had already known that, the magic that Miyuki could use were only: vibration-type magic that affected heating and cooling and healing magic composed of movement, convergence and absorption; the magic that Tatsuya could use were only the Non-Systematic Magic that directly operated Thought Particles (Psions). Moreover, they didn't actually invoke magic, but reproduced it under the appearance of specific spells. Excluding a few spells, the effectiveness of magic was also reproduced, so it was safe to say that it was 「useful」.

The second thing was that the *system*, which **reproduced** Tatsuya and Miyuki's magic in this world, and the *system* that **represented** the magic the red-*robed* mages used, were somehow completely different things. The explosion that occurred when the Thought Particle (Psion) bullet hit the fire spear seemed to be an *alert* highlighting an *error* that was caused by the conflict between different *systems*. It seems that the error was perceived as an explosion by Tatsuya and the others within the world created by

the *system*.

And the third thing was that the range of magic was clearly established. There was a slight difference in the range due to the variety of magic, but in general, it was around thirty metres. And so, should any magic exceed that distance, it won't reach the intended target. Tatsuya thought that this *digital* condition was the result of the influence of his opponents' electronic *system* affecting the function of the *Relic*.

For the time being, the experiment to confirm the difference between real magic and the magic of this world yielded satisfactory results. Although he thought that the game space was somehow more lacking compared to reality, he felt that it was foolish to bring real physical ability into the game. At the very least, players who were unsatisfied with this probably did not bother to play this game, was what Tatsuya understood after thinking it over.

As mentioned previously, one would not be affected by physiological phenomena in this world. In more accurate terms, emission of waste products yielded by biochemical reactions did not occur. Tatsuya noticed that the effect was particularly thorough this time. He recalled sweating in the theatre space that they were dragged into last year. But this time, even that did not exist. Come to think of it, blood didn't appear even when skin was cut. Based on this, it seems only natural that even sweat is not produced.

Therefore, there was no need to go into a bath to wash away sweat, but Tatsuya was dirty due to the dust that he gathered when he rolled on the ground during the battle. And besides, this world was cold. There was a desire to bathe in order to warm up his body.

The mansion was also furnished with a bathroom. A wooden bench was placed in a wet, sprinkling water on heated stones-type *sauna*. Judging that no more visitors would come as the sun had already set, the siblings

decided to postpone their meal and take a bath first.

Tatsuya drew enough water from the well to fill the bucket.

Miyuki used magic to heat a pile of big stones. There were two buckets of water, and they were even big enough to use as bathtubs, so Miyuki only heated one of them to a suitable temperature.

Neither soap, nor the *brush* for washing one's body could be found, but it was a virtual world where there was no need to worry about sebum in the first place, so it was an imitation bath where they only cared about warming up their body and clearing away the dirt. Both siblings were of the opinion that just a *towel* was sufficient.

"Onii-sama, after you."

"No, you should go first. You've been standing outside, where it was at least as cold as midwinter, until dusk. Your body must be cold, right?"

"No matter how you look at it, you're the dirtier one, Onii-sama. Or should I rinse your back?"

Tatsuya immediately raised his white flag at the mischievously smiling Miyuki. Although she had said it jokingly, he felt signs that if he left it alone, she would seriously do it.

A steam bath was basically a thing that stimulated perspiration, but in this world where one would not sweat, one could only hope that the steam loosened the dirt, making it easy to wash off. That's why it wasn't a futuristic style of bath where Tatsuya would bask in steam many times over while *cooling down*[11], so, after warming up his body, he only washed away the dirt with water and got out.

An incident occurred afterwards.

[11] The Engrish "cool down" is probably used in the sense of "relax", instead of "become colder", in this case.

While Miyuki was bathing, Tatsuya relaxed in front of the fireplace. Although he thought 「She's taking her time」, Miyuki has always been the type to take her time in baths. They have been in a world that didn't even have any form of entertainment for two days and, moreover, Miyuki didn't move with her body like Tatsuya in the **mock battle**. She's probably venting her *stress* by bathing, was what Tatsuya thought until that moment.

The moment when he heard unnatural sounds coming from the bathroom.

It was a faint sound. Tatsuya recognised it as the sound of a bucket falling, but as he considered the distance to the bathroom and that the door was shut, he realised that is must have been really loud. It wasn't like the usual Miyuki to be so careless as to make such a noise.

Suddenly realising this fact, Tatsuya stood up in a haste. With the same haste, he ran to the bathroom. He rushed into the dressing room, and called out to her from beyond the door.

"Miyuki, did something happen?"

Thinking that her hand had simply slipped, his first question was asked calmly. But, as he feared, there was no answer from within.

"Miyuki, are you alright!?"

After a bit of hesitation, Tatsuya opened the bathroom door. A large amount of steam gushed out and obstructed Tatsuya's field of vision. When the steam dissipated, Miyuki feebly lying on the bench, and her fair skin blushing like a peach was what came into Tatsuya's view. Tatsuya's bad premonition proved to be accurate.

Although this also applies to bathtubs, *saunas* are specifically intended to stimulate perspiration to make one feel refreshed. And that's the bath-loving Miyuki's passion. She undoubtedly got into the bath with this

intention this time too.

However, in this place, neither Tatsuya, nor Miyuki sweat. That is probably not something restricted to the two of them; there probably isn't a function for the avatars of this world to sweat.

In other words, no matter how long one basked in steam, they would not sweat. Miyuki, who carelessly ended up forgetting this, kept persisting with 「just a bit more」 「just a bit more」 until she passed out due to the heat. Simply put, she had a heat stroke due to being in an airtight environment with high temperature and humidity levels.

Was it Miyuki having collapsed, or was it the *bath towel* that should have been draped around Miyuki's body completely coming off that upset Tatsuya's eyes? Luckily, the *bath towel* hadn't completely fallen down - it still barely covered the most important place to conceal. Although this meant that the worst case scenario was avoided for now, he shouldn't feel comforted until he made sure that the 「worst case」 could not take place.

Leaving that out, Miyuki had passed out and collapsed. And Tatsuya neither had the time to waste by hesitating, nor by feeling lost.

(There are neither sweat glands, nor blood vessels, so how can you get a heatstroke!?)

There was no point in complaining about the irrationality of the situation in his mind. From the beginning, this place was an irrational, artificial world. Even if corners were cut in the heatstroke reproduction *mechanism*, the whim of precisely imitating these symptoms was still carried out. Right now, the symptoms of fever syncope was only being imitated, but who knows if the heat cramps and the heatstroke accompanied by brain dysfunction would be **rendered** on Miyuki's avatar.

Tatsuya tried his best to ensure that he wouldn't touch Miyuki's

body——it was impossible to completely avoid touching her——by draping a *bath towel* around his sister, and proceeded to pour water from the bucket on her from her scalp to her toes. Then, he lifted the sopping wet Miyuki into his arms. Tatsuya left the bathroom and faced the room that he used as a bedroom. Not minding that the bed became wet, he opened the window without closing the door.

A cool wind blew in, reducing the temperature in the room. After touching the nape of Miyuki's neck, he confirmed that her body temperature had visibly decreased compared to earlier. As there was no sweating, hydration shouldn't be necessary, but it wouldn't hurt either. Considering this, Tatsuya closed the window and went to get a jug of water.

The first thing that Miyuki felt was a sense of security.

(Smells like Onii-sama……)

In actual fact, what she perceived was not body odor, but Tatsuya's residual Spirit Particles (Pushions) that remained due to using this bed overnight. Being a Spirit Interference Systematic Magic user, Miyuki perceived smell in addition to perceiving Spirit Particle (Pushion) wave motions, although she usually didn't use it to avoid being misled by the excess *noise*. That 「sense of smell」of hers perceived her brother's residual Spirit Particles (Pushions) as 「her brother's scent」.

Although she wanted to fall asleep wrapped in this absolute tranquility, her consciousness was immediately brought back to reality by the unpleasant moisture.

(Why is the bed so damp……?)

The expression 'damp' was very moderate, considering that the bed she

was lying in was soaking wet.

As she tried raising her body, she recognised what kind of clothes she was wearing through feeling the wet cloth touching her skin. She tried screaming, but couldn't find her voice.

(Why? Why? WHY!?)

She saw herself wearing a loosely wrapped *bath towel*, before that noticing that it only wrapped around her back and came together in the front, and that she was lying in her brother's bed **covered in sweat**. The grief and joy greatly *shocked* Miyuki, and snatched away her ability to think normally.

"Miyuki? Oh thank goodness, you're awake, huh……"

She shifted her eyes towards the voice that came from the room's entrance. Even though this was a dark room, for some reason Miyuki's eyes clear saw the silhouette of her brother. Tatsuya gave a relieved expression with a jug of water in his hand.

"ONII-SAMA, WHY!?"

With her thoughts still in disarray, Miyuki raised her body, grasped her breasts, and shouted in *shock* at Tatsuya.

Being suddenly shouted at by Miyuki, Tatsuya blinked. Considering that she was half asleep, her shout had surprising force.

"Onii-sama, Miyuki feels sad! Even though I wouldn't have refused no matter what it was if you wished for it, Onii-sama!"

I wonder what on earth is this sister of mine misunderstanding……

That was the only *text* that was output to Tatsuya's consciousness. Having been assaulted by an ambiguous shout, the intelligent Tatsuya had his thoughts *frozen* at this point.

"Just, just say the word! Miyuki would happily let you, Onii-sama, have this body and…"

"No- wait a second Miyuki!"

Feeling that his sister was about to blurt out a line that wasn't really proper, Tatsuya somehow managed to successfully interrupt it. Although she ended up being in a hurry, fast-talking to an extent where it was hard to comprehend what she was saying, Tatsuya felt that he wanted to praise himself that he didn't hear the continuation of the 「and」[12].

However, the situation was not resolved yet.

"You collapsed in the bathroom."

Not giving time for Miyuki to counter, Tatsuya revealed his trump *card*, the truth, onto the *table*.

"……Wha?"

The results were instantaneous.

Miyuki's violent emotions disappeared at once as she stared at Tatsuya with a dumbfounded expression.

Using both of her exposed arms and shoulders, she barely concealed her chest.

[12] A part of the sentence was omitted. The omitted part was ——おそらく「さ」と続いて次は「げ」だ—— ("the 「sa」 would probably be followed by 「ge」 "). This refers to how Miyuki's sentence was interrupted at a verb beginning with "sa". Since I don't really know what word was this referring to, I couldn't account for this nuance.

It would definitely end badly if she didn't regain her senses as soon as possible, so Tatsuya, thinking that it was a bit pitiful, explained in detail how they ended up in this situation.

Miyuki's face, which was initially blushing in excitement, turned pale before Tatsuya's eyes. Around the time when Tatsuya finished explaining up to the part where he laid her in bed and went out to get a jug of water, Miyuki's face completely lost its complexion.
——Reflecting her emotions, her face turned pale.

"I am terribly sorry!"

Miyuki suddenly prostrated on the bed. Assuming that she was going to apologise in the honourable, highest-degree *style*, her hands would of course be horizontally brought in front of her face. And then there wouldn't be anything holding the *towel* in its place.

"For my repeated rudeness! And I didn't just caused you trouble, Onii-sama, I also held false doubts about you, spoke ill of you and so on, Miyuki is——!"

"Don't worry about it! I'm not worrying about it either!"

Tatsuya looked away when Miyuki moved her hands away from her breasts, so he didn't see her actual appearance, but unfortunately, even though he didn't physically see it, he knew what was going on. He ended up imagining his sister's nakedness, but instead of sneaking a peek, Tatsuya seemed to be embarrassed.

"I'll go to the living room, so you get dressed properly before coming over."

Tatsuya informed her with a forcibly composed voice. Without turning his face towards Miyuki, he explicitly *turned* 270 degrees, with one of his eyes closed——specifically, he closed his right eye so that the bed on the right side from his current position would not enter his field of vision,

and went towards the room's exit at a quick pace.

Tatsuya of course did not see Miyuki energetically stand up, pressing on the chest of her well-rounded figure with both hands. However, right now, Tatsuya clearly imagined an evocative scene of his own creation[13], to his curse. This was originally a technique to compensate for *blind*ness in the midst of battle, so he had no need for it to activate in this situation, and he wanted to stress this in a loud voice.

Finally, Tatsuya stepped out of his own room. As the thick wooden door muffled the scream of embarrassment surging from behind him, Tatsuya hastily dashed towards the living room.

It was the morning of the third day in the dream-space virtual-world. Tatsuya opened his eyes after hearing sounds that hurt his ears outside the window.

(We're still not back……)

The same imaginary bedroom he saw yesterday once again reflected in his eyes. Confirming that he was still trapped in a dream world, Tatsuya had an urge to sigh.

(As I thought, it seems that we cannot wake up if we don't deal with the *scenario* and *clear* a necessary *event*……)

However, fighting on its own was useless, and even the happening with his sister that he didn't want to remember did not fulfil the necessary requirements.

(No, could last night even be considered a necessary event in the first place?)

[13] Literally, Engrish for "image".

Assuming that it really was a simple *happening*…… thinking so, he would **decompose** this world without thinking about the consequences.

(Even if it was a requirement that needs to be *cleared*, it is probably useless at any rate…… though, what's with the noise this early in the morning……)

The sky was covered by thick clouds, so it was impossible to know the time based on the position of the sun. Therefore there was the possibility that it was already forenoon, instead of 「early in the morning」, but Tatsuya was in a inimitable mental state of wanting to sleep just a bit longer. ——Last night's event was enough to have him mentally worn out.

However, even as he idly complained about it in his mind, he got out of his *bed* which, for some reason, lacked moisture and was softly heated. He then quickly put on his clothes and armour, equipped his *viking sword* and *parrying dagger* to his waist, and left the bedroom. At the entry hall, Miyuki was waiting for him while holding the spear that he used.

"Morning, Miyuki."

"Good morning, Onii-sama. Did you sleep well?"

Tatsuya sighed in relief that Miyuki, at least on the surface, wasn't obsessing over last night.

"Yeah, I was able to rest well."

Tatsuya knew that the reason why there were no traces of his *bed* having been wet was because Miyuki used her limited magic to dry the bed.

"That's good to hear."

Although Tatsuya was worried if he hinted that, Miyuki would remember last night as a consequence, but luckily, it seemed that she got

over the accident. Tatsuya slightly sighed in relief at that. He learnt from last year's experience that an **incident within a dream** would drag on forever and make them feel awkward emotions.

"I have made the preparations for breakfast."

"I'll get this over with as soon as possible."

Tatsuya responded to Miyuki's banter (?) with his own, but for some reason he felt that it wouldn't be resolved that easily. ——On the contrary, he had a premonition that the pointless commotion would finally come to an end with this.

"I wish you luck. Just in case, I'll be cheering you on."

For some reason, Miyuki probably felt that this would be the *climax*. He could feel seriousness in her formal tone.

"You probably won't need to go to such trouble. See you later."

After being seen off by Miyuki who bowed elegantly, Tatsuya opened the door that led outside.

(It's two parties this time, huh?)

The reason for Tatsuya's judgment was an obvious outward difference between the two *groups*.

One of them was the already-familiar fully red-coloured group. However, this time it wasn't a shounen, but a seinen[14]…… or perhaps a grown up male, covered in noticeably flashy red spirit particle light, who was leading the *group*.

[14] A seinen (青年, young man) is a male between 17 and 30 something years old.

And the other one was…… a party rich with *variation*.

The seinen (?) with the face of a wandering samurai and who appeared to be the eldest was of course clad in red. However, the other six were clad in different colours. Light blue, black, golden tinged with green, pink - their hair and clothes were of various colours, and they even came with a cat-ear *option*. And most of all, even the point that there were females mixed in differed.

No, this expression was probably incorrect. Based on the number of people, rather than females being mixed in, it would be more accurate to say that a seinen and a shounen were mixed in among the females. Or perhaps, a shounen leading five beautiful girl bodyguards——according to a certain acquaintance who liked *retro* games, the expression「*harem* of beautiful girls」 seemed to be suitable——as well as a guardian of the girls, or something like that?

After he glanced back and forth between the two *groups* standing a small distance apart from each other, Tatsuya called out to the well-built seinen leading the red group.

"Are you in the mood to talk? Or do you see no point to it?"

Were Tatsuya's words very unexpected? Both *groups*, the red army led by the seinen and the beautiful-girl bodyguard group *plus one* led by a shounen, began discussing something. Tatsuya could not hear what they were saying from where he stood, but it seemed that the commotion calmed down to a conclusion of leaving it to the *leaders*, and the red seinen and black shounen exchanged glances.

The seinen placed his hand on his sword handle.

While gesturing 「now now」 with his hands to calm him down, the shounen nodded with a bitter smile that said 「I know」.

With just 「If you know that, then it's fine」, the seinen moved his hand

away from the handle.

The result of the discussion via *eye contact* and *body language*, was that the black shounen opened his mouth to respond to Tatsuya's question.

"I'm Kirito. And you are?"

As the shounen clad entirely in black named himself, the bodyguards *plus one* behind him looked as if a question mark, implying 'is he befriending him', appeared on their faces. It seems that the shounen's actions were unexpected even to his allies.

Before Tatsuya could answer, one among the shounen's group, the pink-haired girl puffed 「pu」. 「What d'ya think ya'r doing?」 was written on her face.

However, although his speech and actions were unexpected to the girls, to Tatsuya, it was finally a normal response that he received. But, unfortunately, in these circumstances, Tatsuya could only reply with a not-so-ordinary answer.

"In this place, I don't know what name I should be called."

Behind the shounen calling himself Kirito, the pink-haired girl who could be mistaken for a merry drinker puffed again. What a show off-like line, is what she undoubtedly thought. After all, even Tatsuya himself felt that it sounded like that.

However, Tatsuya didn't have any better reply. Even if he gave his real name, it didn't seem significant. Because he ended up as an 「actor」 trapped in this 「play」.

He had the role of the villain who obstructed them from kidnapping Miyuki who had been given the role of Gerðr. If his relation to Miyuki as a brother is emphasised, then his official title is Gerðr's older brother Beli. But, if his role to hinder **Skírnir** is emphasised, then he is Gerðr's

father and the lord of the mansion, Gymir. Having thought this far, Tatsuya came up with a question.

"If your name is Kirito, then this time Skírnir is that seinen?"

"Skírnir?"

The one who asked the question was the golden-haired girl.

"I am Eugene of the *salamanders*."

At Tatsuya's question, the red seinen answered with his name. After hearing it, Tatsuya inclined his head to the side.

Salamanders
"Fire lizards? Fire spirits? ……Oh, could that be your *group*'s name?"

All the people facing Tatsuya exchanged glances among their respective groupmates.

"*No-name*-san."

The black Kirito-shounen called out to Tatsuya. Accepting 「*No-name*」 as his designation, Tatsuya turned his eyes towards the shounen. Although Tatsuya carelessly hadn't noticed until now, a child-*sized* girl who had grown wings, more accurately an existence that could only be
P i x i e
called a small fairy, was standing on the shounen's shoulder and whispering something near Kirito-shounen's ear.

"I can't believe it's possible, but are you a *player*?"

To this question, Tatsuya didn't reply, but instead asked a question.

"What do you mean by *player*?"

Kirito-shounen and Eugene-seinen, who was lined up behind him and had heard the question, frowned in suspicion. They were probably

unable to understand the meaning of the question. Of course they had no intention of sparing Tatsuya from the labourious task of explaining.

"If you're asking it with the meaning of a person who plays under the *rules* of their chosen role, then I am not a *player*. Because I am here not of my own will."

Tatsuya could hear 「Is he really an NPC?」 noises among the *salamander group*, but Tatsuya ignored it. Although the *game* NPC treatment from yesterday continued, compared to yesterday's group of shounen who couldn't even see the purpose of the conversation, today's conversation was much better.

And besides, Kirito-shounen didn't agree with the judgement that Tatsuya was an NPC. The reason why he wanted to continue the conversation was probably because he felt goodwill from him.

"Kirito-kun…… if you don't mind me calling you that, may I ask you a question?"

Without waiting for Kirito-shounen to nod, Tatsuya threw a question at him.

"You are all *players*, right?"

The swordsman clad entirely in black exchanged words with the girls and the red wandering samurai behind him in a whisper, then turned around to face Tatsuya again.

"Yeah. We are *players* of *ALfheim Online*."

"*ALfheim Online*…… That is a *virtual reality online game* realised via *electronic* technology, am I right?"

"……Yeah."

"Just as I thought, it's **intertwined**, huh."

An expression of understanding, then admiration, appeared on Tatsuya's face.

"However, constructing a VR environment that completely reproduces vision, hearing, and sense of touch with just *electronic* technology, and also sharing all of it over the network……It seems that the technology of your world is far more advanced than ours."

"……What?"

The deepest colour of confusion so far dyed the shounen's face. Tatsuya noticed this, but did not raise the issue.

"I'm not too knowledgeable about *online games*, but what brought you here was obviously a *quest*, right?"

The easily noticeable, beautiful girl with long, light blue hair standing right behind the shounen asked the black swordsman, no the pixie riding on his shoulder 「Is this person really not a player?」. Unfortunately, the pixie's answer didn't reach Tatsuya's ears.

"That's right. We accepted Frey's request and came here to bring Gerðr back."

At the black shounen's line, this time Tatsuya became confused.

"Bring her back? Gerðr has already married Frey? In that case, you're not Skírnir?"

This time, the gold-tinged-with-green haired girl spoke to Kirito-shounen.

"Onii-chan, this person seems to have the wrong idea, as he thinks that we came for a different *quest*."

"Different *quest*?"

Ignoring Tatsuya, the black shounen began a conversation with the green and golden-haired girl, but as it was something that Tatsuya also wanted to know, he continued pricking his ears.

If their conversation was summarised, it would sound like this.

In the timeline of this world, Frey and Gerðr had already got married. And, for some reason, Gerðr seems to have passed away. Not giving up on his dead wife, Frey proclaimed that he would reward subordinate fairies who recovered Gerðr from Niflheimr; that was the whole story.

(Hey hey…… Skirnir's *episode* and Hermóðr's horseback ride to the realm of the dead were mixed together. In that case, taking Miyuki and going to Frey's residence is the condition for returning to the real world?)

"Kirito-kun."

Understanding the main points of his circumstances, Tatsuya threw a question out of curiosity.

"What did Frey say he would give as a reward? After marrying Gerðr, the 『Sword of Victory』 should no longer be in Frey's hands."

"The 『Skíðblaðnir』[15]. That ship is needed for the next *quest*."

The greenish golden girl with a sullen voice that was probably angry interrupted Tatsuya right in the middle of his **friendly** chat with the shounen and answered Tatsuya's question.

"That's right."

[15] Skíðblaðnir (anglicised as "Skidbladnir" or Skithblathnir") is a ship owned by Frey in Norse mythology. It had a special ability that allowed it to be folded up like cloth and stored in one's pocked until needed.

Eugene-seinen who had entrusted Kirito-shounen with the opponent Tatsuya until now had enough waiting around, drew his sword and took a step forward.

"You'd better obediently hand over Gerðr. Or else……"

At the open threat, Tatsuya's eyes quickly narrowed.

"Eugene-san, wait!"

The one who interrupted this explosive atmosphere was the girl with the long, light-blue hair. She intercepted Eugene-seinen from the back, then turned her eyes towards Tatsuya.

"I am Asuna."

For some reason, the *salamander* group went into a stir after hearing that self-introduction. Various mutters such as 「Is that……」, 「It's the first time I've seen the real thing……」, 「She's cuter than in the two-dimensional *data*」, 「Wha, the *Berserk Healer* is such a beauty?」 leaked out, but Tatsuya ignored their voices, which gave him a strange sense of deja vu, without showing a wry smile.

"Asuna-san, huh. So?"

"……*No-name*-san, would you allow us to speak with Gerðr?"

It seems that the reason why the girl named Asuna hesitated for a moment was because she was at a loss on how to address Tatsuya.
——In the end, she seems to have decided to follow her lover's (?) lead.

"This is just absurd!"

From behind Asuna-jou, Eugene-seinen's displeased voice could be heard.

"That is not a *player*. That thing is an NPC. He's neither amicable, nor neutral, he's an antagonistic NPC, an *enemy*! Is there any room for negotiation?"

"Although you call him antagonistic, weren't you attacking him before he counterattacked in return? Even if he's not a *player*, that person has his own will. I don't think that discussion is impossible."

Asuna-jou now turned her back to Tatsuya. She was completely full of openings, and moreover, there was no one on her side; such a state could not be called being vigilant. Could this mean that she was putting her faith in him? Tatsuya thought so.

If they had the intention to hold a discussion with their opponent, even Tatsuya wasn't reluctant to reciprocate. Returning to reality was his first and only goal. Hence a stalemate was extremely undesirable. As Miyuki meeting with 「Frey」 could possibly be an *event clear* condition, from Tatsuya's perspective, Asuna-jou's proposal had plenty of room for consideration.

However, it seems that their *game* wasn't this peaceful.

"If he has his own will, then that's all the more reason discussions and the like are impossible. He dealt with eighteen of my comrades just yesterday. His cruel way of killing was to break one of my men's leg in a no-flight *area* and leave him in that condition to freeze to death!"

"……He couldn't use *healing*? What about potions?"

"I heard that the ones who could use magic were killed off the first."

It's probably natural as this is just a *game*, but it seemed that yesterday's shounens had been safely revived. Having heard Eugene's words, that's the only thing that Tatsuya thought about.

“Using up one’s *potions* was his *mistake*, but even so, I don’t expect a discussion with a guy who left him alone with neither a finishing blow, nor treatment, to be feasible.

Tatsuya also had something to say. He thought that expecting treatment and the like while one-sidedly attacking him was asking too much, but if his opponents judged that 「a talk is impossible」, then he had no choice but to accept that it was true.

“As we had arranged, Kirito, my group is doing it first.”

The person that the red seinen was talking to was the black shounen.

“Asuna, stay back. Pushing our way onto Eugene is against the *rules*.”

At Kirito-shouen’s words, Asuna-jou stepped to the back while having the hair on her back pulled from behind.

“You've been kept waiting, Beli.”

I see, it seems that Eugene-seinen had heard from yesterday’s shounens that Miyuki called Tatsuya 「Onii-sama」. However, in that case, there wasn’t a cooperative relationship between Eugene-seinen and Kirito-shounen. If there’s one reward, it would more likely be a competitive relationship. And yet, it was very gentlemanly of him to discuss and decide their turns, was what Tatsuya felt. And he even felt envious. To them, fighting was probably just a game. Tatsuya couldn't help but feel a bloody intent for a world which felt so close to real world yet **allowed killing each other**, but he hoped that it was just an absurd fear.

“I’ll say it again. Hand over Gerðr. Or else.”

“No.”

Tatsuya dismissed Eugene-seinen’s words. It would be one thing if he said 「Let Miyuki meet Frey」, but as he said 「Hand over Miyuki」,

there's no way that Tatsuya would agree.

It seemed that Eugene had no intention of continuing the dialogue any further either. Even Tatsuya didn't expect a serious discussion to arise. However, an unexpected thing did happen.

"Are you fine on your own?"

"Don't you lump me in with those beginners (newbies) that haven't even grown hair yet! I'm going to bring you down in a one-on-one fight!"

Eugene-seinen fiercely jabbed at Tatsuya. Just as he had proclaimed about the difference in his status, the seinen's swordsmanship was on a different level from yesterday's shounens. Even the two-handed sword in his hands looked like a unique holy sword or magic sword.

On the other hand, the spear handle that Tatsuya had to fight against it was just an ordinary wooden one that, far from having an iron core, didn't even have leather wrapped around it. If he was directly struck by the seinen's slashing attack, it would probably end up easily being broken or sliced.

Tatsuya had no intention of being directly struck by such a heavyweight-class attack. Matching his *step*, Tatsuya rotated the spear, using its handle to block the centre of the two-handed sword, avoiding a direct hit *course* of the linear slash. Aiming the spearhead at his opponent's feet, he ensured that Eugene wouldn't be able to assume a proper stance.

Based on what the group of shounen from yesterday had said, they were used to in-flight battles. As proof of that, Eugene-seinen's footwork wasn't as polished as his swordsmanship. To be honest, he judged that Eugene's technique of manipulating an unsheathed sword was better than his own. But as for footwork and other motions with one's feet on the ground, Tatsuya was more or less superior.

Irritation appeared on the seinen's face. He was probably more annoyed about not being able to assume a proper stance than his attack not reaching its target. Additionally, Tatsuya found something like a habit in the seinen's fighting style. Eugene-seinen had a tendency of trying to find the opportunity clash their blades, or to strike the opponent's shield with his blade.

When Tatsuya intentionally showed an opening, Eugene-seinen struck with a powerful blow from an irrational posture.

Tatsuya *backstepped*, dodged and then stepped forward towards the shounen with a seemingly defenceless stance after his sword was swung horizontally.

The red seinen laughed while giving a wide grin.

Despite his broken posture, the shounen slashed his sword back from the right to the left with the power of just one arm.

A prone postured slash. In that case, Tatsuya would probably be able to stop it, even with his simple spear.

However, Tatsuya did not block the seinen's sword with the handle of his spear.

He let go of his spear and used his left hand to strike the right wrist of the sword swinging shounen.

The sword that sprung from the seinen's hand grazed Tatsuya's back.

This alone tore Tatsuya's leather armour to pieces.

The blade reached beneath the armour. However, **if this was the real world**, it would have only slashed the skin. Tatsuya didn't mind a wound that would not bleed.

By striking with his right hand, he grasped the seinen's left wrist, and moved his right palm under the opponent's chin.

While pulling his right hand, Tatsuya kicked the back of his opponent's right knee with his right heel, twisted his body to the left, and wrapped around the large build of Eugene-seinen.

A variation of an osoto makikomi[16]. The difference from a *standard* osoto makikomi was kicking the back of his opponent's knee with his heel, instead of tackling with his leg, and not being stuck to his opponent. Then he twisted his opponents neck while pushing the collarbone, and struck his head towards the ground.——

With a tremor, the two fell to the ground on top of one another. Tatsuya was on top, while Eugene-seinen at the bottom. Tatsuya's right hand still grasped Eugene-seinen's jaw.

There was no sensation of the breaking neck bones.

However, there was indeed a reaction.

Tatsuya stood up, Eugene-seinen didn't.

He was still breathing. The seinen opened his eyes wide and fainted.

While it was still as silent as the grave, Tatsuya picked up his spear and pointed its tip at Kirito-shounen.

The shounen's body was enveloped in impenetrably black spirit-particle lights. The black swordsman drew his sword.

Asuna-jou extended her hand to Kirito-shounen, but the golden girl and the pink-haired girl stopped her.

[16] An osoto makikomi (大外巻き込み, big outer wraparound) is a judo technique. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qv8jxYlgqDM

In order not to trip over the collapsed Eugene-seinen, Tatsuya moved ten steps while in a hanmi stance.

Kirito-shounen followed Tatsuya by cautiously *side stepping*.

Tatsuya stopped moving, and Kirito-shounen stopped moving.

The next moment, Kirito-shounen faced Tatsuya and charged at a speed that Tatsuya could not even follow with his eyes.

Tatsuya immediately realised the he had underestimated the shounen's true strength.

This shounen was strong.

His skill with a sword was unmistakably better than Tatsuya's spear handling technique.

He did not have the shoddy footwork of Eugene-seinen.

His swordsmanship lacked disorder, as if he had been swinging a sword every day for who knows how many years.

What made Tatsuya's eyes open wide the most was the superhuman slashing speed that coincided with his sword sometimes glowing. No, it was completely beyond the limit of a *speed* that humans could achieve. The reason why his opponent couldn't make a slash deep enough to reach his bone was: Tatsuya predicted his opponent's movement and evaded it before the sword even began to strike him; when a sword glowed, its aim would not change en route, and after the shounen swung with his sword at a superhuman *speed*, his movement temporarily stopped.

However, even if Tatsuya were to call it a period of rigidity, he couldn't

use that opening. That was because even if he began dodging before he was struck by the sword, he could never hope to completely avoid it.

He no longer had the time to choose an approach. Even the damage dealt was probably close to the limit. The black swordsman's sword... glowed.

Tatsuya intercepted it with the handle of his spear.

Just before the spear was broken by the slash, Tatsuya utilised the bending of the handle, but was sent flying a large distance backward.

A virtual *cartridge* was already set.

"*Default, load*."

Holding the spear in his right hand, Tatsuya pointed his left index finger towards the black swordsman.

A visualised Thought Particle (Psion) bullet fired at Kirito-shounen.

The shounen twisted his body with unbelievable reflexes.

The Phantom Blow Thought Particle (Psion) bullet grazed the shounen's flank and tore his clothes.

A second bullet was charged at Tatsuya's fingertips.

The shounen brandished his sword.

Tatsuya fired Phantom Blow——and Kirito-shounen's sword slashed and tore through the Thought Particle (Psion) bullet!

At the unexpected scene, Tatsuya stiffened.

The black swordsman fiercely charged.

Tatsuya half-unconsciously pulled his spear with his right hand towards his shoulder.

When the shounen unleashed his glowing slash attack, Tatsuya noticed that there was a fixed rule.

The *motion* right before the sword started glowing was always the same.

It did not mean that the glowing slash attack would come from the same stance.

It depended on the respective weapon play, but the beginning *motion* was pretty much the same.

The reason why Tatsuya had not suffered fatal wounds due to the sword speed that was over the limit of humans was that he had seen through that rule at an early stage.

To discover what to do, Tatsuya had absolutely no choice but to learn by watching his opponent.

It was in desperation and, at the same time, based on a hopeful calculation that, even if the chances were slim, it might be able to restrain the next attack, which was probably impossible to cope with otherwise.

An expression of shock appeared in the black swordsman's eyes.

Despite losing his footing, Kirito-shounen assumed a stance, with his left hand forward, and his right hand moving his sword towards his shoulder.

The shounen's sword glowed in deep crimson.

Tatsuya did not notice.

That his own spear was also covered in the same light.

Tatsuya thrusted his spear.

After a mere delay, the shounen thrusted his sword.

Tatsuya's spear and Kirito-shounen's sword reached the body of their respective opponent at the same time.

Tatsuya's spear pierced Kirito-shounen's left shoulder,

While Kirito's sword pierced Tatsuya's chest.

A shrill shriek could be heard.

With the sword still piercing his chest, Tatsuya looked over his shoulder.

Unnoticed, Miyuki peeked out of the mansion's entranceway.

Although it was a miracle that he didn't die right away, that instantly no longer had any significance.

Miyuki's beautiful visage was warped in anguish.

The reason for his sister making such an expression was the elimination of her elder brother.

With his consciousness fading, Tatsuya mustered the last of his strength.

The electronic *network* that was intertwined with Thought Particles (Psions) and Spirit Particles (Psions).

Intervening in that structure, Tatsuya 「Decomposed」 this world.

From all directions, he could hear sounds as if hundreds of glass objects shattered.

This time, Tatsuya's consciousness was sucked into the darkness……

◇◇◇

"……i-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama!"

His sister's lovely voice desperately called out to him.

To respond to that voice, Tatsuya recovered his consciousness from the bottom of the darkness.

"Miyuki…… Don't cry."

"Onii-sama, thank goodness!"

Having said that, Miyuki embraced Tatsuya.

While stopping his sister's body, Tatsuya looked around left and right.

This was his room, in their own home.

Dressed in his sleepwear, Tatsuya gave in to Miyuki, similarly dressed in sleepwear, hugging him.

The numbers visible on the wall display were indeed of the next day of the date that he remembered.

Looking at it objectively, he was sleeping like usual, and waking up as usual.

"I've overslept, huh…… Will I be able to make it to morning training?"

“Geez…… oh you, Onii-sama.”

At Tatsuya’s voice, Miyuki told him while still embracing him with a smile while crying.

“Miyuki…… You also saw it, right?”

Despite voicing that question, he would be lying if he said that he wasn't hesitant.

However, he couldn’t let it end without asking that either.

“……Yes. Onii-sama, at that time, Miyuki thought that her heart was going to stop……”

“That wasn’t reality. You do realise that, right?”

While gently stroking Miyuki’s hair, Tatsuya said that to calm her down.

However, Miyuki didn’t stop hugging Tatsuya.

(……Well, it's fine.)

Speaking of which, Minami was **on her way home** right about now. No one would interrupt them.

For a while, Tatsuya allowed his sister to do as she pleased. Tatsuya began thinking about last night’s mysterious dream, though it was not a means to turn his attention away from Miyuki’s soft and supple limbs.

Initially, about one’s senses. About the theory that a *virtual reality* world made using *electronic* technology was merged with a virtual reality dream world formed by spirit particles. About the possibility of a technology that interfered with spirit particles using electronics.

However, before long Tatsuya's attention focused on last night's battle.

The battle to the death with the black swordsman. He felt that it had been a long time since he was driven to a corner like that. And he remembered how, under that *pressure*, his heart pounded in that battle of swords and magic.

(If that was **just a game** managed **in this world**, then there would probably be a chance to challenge that shounen for *revenge*……)

He was unfortunately drawn into that unreasonable world twice now, but it probably wouldn't be bad if he could get a rematch with him. Tatsuya felt these conflicting thoughts.

——Luckily or unluckily, the chance to have a rematch in that world never came. In the end, Tatsuya and Miyuki didn't identify the true form of the *Relic* that showed them that dream.

End